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SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: PRISON REFORM AND GANG INTELLIGENCE
INITIATIVE MOVES FORWARD

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: El Salvador hosted the first Regional "Gangs in Prison" Conference in San Salvador, August 18-20. The conference, which drew attendees from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, established a dialogue on management of prison gangs in Central America. Following the conference, New Mexico State corrections officials assisted El Salvador in establishing an action plan for implementing an inter-agency prison gang task force that will collect intelligence on El Salvador's prison gangs and their operations. The conference and reforms at Izalco prison established a baseline for effective anti-gang best practices and information sharing networks throughout the region. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) August 18-20, the Government of El Salvador (GOES) hosted the first Regional Gangs in Prison Conference in San Salvador. The conference was the result of a cooperative effort between the GOES Central Prison System (DGCP) and INL San Salvador. High level corrections officials from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the state of New Mexico, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the National Civilian Police of El Salvador (PNC), and INL officers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras participated. The INL CIV/POL Senior Corrections Advisor and the INL Regional Gang Advisor delivered the keynote presentations during the conference.

[1](#)3. (U) In his opening remarks, Minister of Public Security Rene Figueroa emphasized the importance of curbing transnational criminal gang activity in the prison systems throughout the region. In addition, Ambassador Vilchez of the Central American Regional Integration System (SICA), INL Regional Gang Advisor (RGA), INL Senior Corrections Advisor (SCA), and prison authorities of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras made presentations on the subjects of regional cooperation, best practices, and challenges to improving management of gangs in prisons.

[1](#)4. (U) The second day of the conference consisted of a site visit to the Izalco prison where approximately 700 M-18 gang members are incarcerated. Izalco is considered a model facility for managing gangs in prisons in El Salvador. It has received extensive training and financial support from INL and CIV/POL. It has also benefited substantially from the letter of agreement established between INL and New Mexico Department of Corrections.

[1](#)5. (U) The third and final day of the conference was a wrap-up of the major themes of regional cooperation, and the importance of integrity and sustainability in future initiatives. The conference produced a written declaration stipulating that transnational gang activity in prisons is a serious regional threat which requires regional solutions; efforts will continue to improve methods of sharing intelligence on a regional level; and future such conferences will be beneficial.

¶6. (U) On August 21-22 officials from the New Mexico State Department of Corrections conducted prison site surveys. With their Salvadoran counterparts, they developed an action plan for implementing an inter-agency prison gang intelligence task force. Salvadorans from the agencies involved had previously received INL sponsored prison intelligence unit training at the New Mexico Department of Corrections July 7-11, 2008.

¶7. (U) The implementation of the prison gang intelligence task force aims to improve the collection and dissemination of actionable intelligence in an effort to curtail organized crime activities from within and outside the prison systems. It is common, for example, for imprisoned gang leaders to continue to order and direct criminal activities from their prison cells. Police often confiscate mobile phones, but new phones find their way back into the gangsters hands.

¶8. (U) Comment: The conference is an excellent example of significant incremental progress achieved through coordination between Washington-based subject matter experts, INL practitioners in the field, and representatives from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. INL/CIVPOL's corrections programs have allowed Embassy San Salvador to focus resources, expertise, and capacity on one of the most pressing problems facing this country -- transnational gang violence radiating out of El Salvador's overcrowded, overburdened prison system. End Comment.
GLAZER